



T H E
L I F E
O F
St. Mary of Egypt.
T H E
Example and Model
O F A
TRUE PENITENT.

Many Sins are forgiven her, because she loved much.

LUKE, c. 7. v. 47.

Qui secutus es errantem, Sequere Poenitentem.

Have you gone astray with her? Repent with her.

S. AMBROSE.

L I V E R P O O L :

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THE

STANDARD

OF

STANDARD OF EGYPT

THE



TRUE PENITENT

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OF

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1856



T O T H E
CHRISTIAN READER.



THE Life I here present you, Christian Reader, is so much of the marvellous Kind, that in our present Sceptic Age, which looks upon every Event as fabulous and romantic that does not appear in the common Light and within the ordinary Course of Providence, it may be judged necessary to vindicate it from that Imputation. I have, therefore, in the Preamble to this wonderful History, prepared you for it, by endeavouring to make you sensible that the Ways of Almighty God, in his Conduct of the Elect, are impenetrable; and the Operations of Grace above the Reach of human Understanding. In the Close of the Life, I have produced unquestionable Precedents from the revealed History, Holy Writ, parallel to whatsoever Event you had met with of the surprising Nature, in what you had just read, to evince their Feasibility and Credibility.

To the Christian Reader.


And whereas the Memoirs of the Saints, and of those who have been most conspicuous in their Fidelity and Correspondence with GOD's Graces, have been providentially preserved and handed down to us, not so much to raise our Admiration of them, as for our own Instruction, and to put us upon an Emulation of their Virtues; I have shewn that the same Fruit may also be drawn from the Life we have before us; and by annexing proper Reflections and Inferences from it, and bringing the Business home to ourselves, I have calculated it for every one's State and Condition, who having been Sinners like St. MARY of Egypt, are desirous, like her, of becoming true and sincere Penitents.

May GOD, in his infinite Mercy and Goodness, through the Intercession of our Saint, inspire every one, that reads her penitential Life, with these salutary Resolutions. Amen.





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CHRISTIAN READER.

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of

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of Jubilee on this Triumph of Grace over Sin and Satan ; or that can think either their Persons, their Sex, or their Character dishonoured, by having an eminent Example of true Penitence submitted to their Admiration ; offered as a Subject proper to employ their contemplative Hours, and not wholly out of the Reach of their Imitation.

The Mercy of GOD, and the astonishing Power of Divine Grace is, certainly, more conspicuous upon a Sinner becoming a Penitent, than in a virtuous, unspotted Soul retaining its primitive Beauty, and preserving untainted its Innocence, And, therefore, tho' the Repentance of St. MARY of Egypt for Sins, the Innocent never had been guilty of, does not fall to their Share ; yet her inflamed Love of GOD, after her Conversion ; her grateful thankfulness for the Divine Mercies shewn her ; her unshaken Fidelity, and close Attachment to her Duty, in a steady Course of Virtue ; her Exercises of Penance, and a total Affection to what was good, with an utter Abhorrence of Evil, are Objects of every one's Imitation ; of the Saint as well as the Sinner ; of the Perfect and Imperfect. St. John Baptist, tho' sanctified in his Mother's Womb, did not dispense himself with the Practice of any Part of these Virtues : And the Rule of all Virtue,
Sanctity

To the Christian Reader.

Sanctity itself, our Blessed Lord, who tells us that He has set himself as a Pattern to us, to do as he has done, [St. John c. 13. v. 15.] was eminently distinguished in every Branch of the most consummate Virtue.

These then, Gentle Reader, are the Lessons of Christian Perfection the History of St. MARY of Egypt furnishes us with; Courage to enter upon the Course of Virtue and Penance; Fidelity and Constancy in the Practice of it; and what is to crown all our Labours at last, in our spiritual Career, final Perseverance. May God, in his infinite Mercy and Goodness, through the Intercession of our Saint, inspire us with her generous Resolution; bless it here with his Grace of Perseverance, and reward it hereafter with his unperishable Glory. Amen.



T H E



T H E
L I F E
O F

Saint *MARY* of EGYPT.

S E C T. I.

The impenetrable Mystery of Almighty God's Conduct, with respect to his Elect, accounts for every Thing that occurs in the Saints Lives of the surprising or marvellous Nature.



THE Glory of God is display'd throughout all his Works, but in a different Manner. In the Works of Nature he is visible and magnificent : *The Heavens,* says the Psalmist, *proclaim the Glory of God.* [Psf. 18, v. 1.] In his Operations of Grace,

and his superior Conduct with regard to his Elect, he is invisible, but wonderful : *Wonderful*, said the same Prophet, *is God in his Saints.* [Psf. 67. v. 36.] Here the Mystery of his Divine Counsels surpasses all Human Understanding, and is out of the Power of Man to unfold. Here St. Paul, that illuminated Apostle, who was caught up into Paradise, and was made privy to Secrets, which it is not granted to Man to utter, [2 Cor. c. 12. v. 4.] when he came to speak of the Dispensations of Divine Grace, found himself at a Plunge, and confessed that he was unequal to the Task ; crying out, in an Extasy of Admiration, *oh Altitudo !* that this was a Secret kept from him, an Abyss he was unable to fathom, a boundless Ocean ! To wit, Almighty God brings about his merciful Designs in regard to Man, his Operations, I say, of Grace, from contrary Causes ; and even draws Good out of Evil : He trains up his Servants to Virtue by various Trials ; and through crosse, intricate, and seemingly opposite Paths, leads them up to the Mount of Perfection.

SOME, for Instance, he stamps with the Marks of his special Favour and Election from
the

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the first Moment they receive their Being. *Jacob* was favoured with this distinctive Preference to his Brother *Esau*, when, they being yet unborn, God said of them, *Jacob I love ; Esau I have in abhorrence.* [*Malach. c. 1. v. 3. Rom. c. 9. v. 11. 15.*] Virtue in these Favourites of Heaven seems to be their natural Disposition, and the Service of their Maker their Delight and whole Occupation. Fortunate Souls ! who have here, as it were, a foretaste of the heavenly Joys, and are exercising themselves now in what will be their perpetual Employment, and constitute their essential Happiness, for an Eternity hereafter ; contemplating God and loving him.

OTHERS, on the contrary, are doom'd to painful Struggles and Conflicts with the *Flesh*, the *World* and the *Devil*, so long as they live ; and are necessitated to wade to Heaven through the Waters of sundry Tribulations, and almost insurmountable Difficulties.

THERE is a third Class, entirely different from the two we have mention'd, of such as suffer themselves to be hurried away at first, by the impetuosity of their Passions, into the Gulf of Vice ; falling down with the Stream,

till their patient Saviour, watching a favourable Opportunity, stops them in their Career, and brings them back to their Duty. Of such as drink of the intoxicating Cups of Impiety and Vanity, even to a Surfeit, before they are prevailed upon to look out for a Remedy to recover themselves out of their loathsome State. Of those, infine, who sink so deep into the Mire and Filth of Sin, as to have Occasion for a miraculous Power to drag them out of it : But being, thro' the gracious Mercy of God, once happily reclaimed from their evil Ways, they become as eager in the pursuit of Virtue as they had been before in the practice of Vice ; and even their *Passions*, and their natural Vivacity of Temper, are, by a happy Turn, made the Instruments to the Divine Grace in their Sanctification and Perfection.——Such was once St. *Paul*, of an enrag'd Wolf, instantly changed into a meek Lamb ; of a virulent Persecutor of *Christ's* Disciples, made a zealous Profelyte himself. Such, among many others, was afterwards that great Light of the Church St. *Austine* ; who, from a professed Libertine, became a Teacher and Example of Virtue ; from a pertinacious Abettor of Error, a strenuous

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uous Champion for Truth. Such also was St. *Mary of Egypt*, whose Life I attempt to give a short Sketch of in the following Lines.

S E C T. II.

The Birth of St. Mary of Egypt : Her sinful Life in the World ; her miraculous Call to Repentance, and thorough Conversion.

S AINT *Mary of Egypt*, so surnamed from the Country that gave her Birth, in the fifth Century, was blessed with good natural Parts ; was of a quick, lively Temper, but wholly under the Government of her concupiscible Appetites, and a Slave to Sensuality. With these fervent, impetuous Dispositions, she had not the Patience to brook the inevitable Restraint laid upon her in her Parents House, from whose watchful Eyes no Part of her Conduct could be hid ; and what was irregular was sure to meet with its just Rebuke. Therefore, being but twelve Years old, (ripe for her Age, but riper in Malice) she, like the prodigal Child, privately withdrew from her paternal Home, renouncing all temporal Expectances she had there, and the Prospect of an honest

honest and creditable Settlement, to go to *Alexandria*, a large and populous City in *Egypt*, where she might give the Reins to her Passions without Check or Control. There she effectually abandon'd herself up to all the Liberties of a licentious and sinful Life, satiating her own lustful Appetites, and becoming, at the same Time, the Agent and Minister to the criminal Pleasures of others ; a Snare to the Innocent, and the Corrupter of Youth ; whom, by every Artifice, she endeavour'd to debauch, and to make them a Party in her sinful Disorders : And, lest the desire of Lucre should be thought to influence her criminal Prostitutions, she affected to reject what her Gallants voluntarily offer'd her, maintaining herself by Begging, or from the Work of her Hands ; by this Means doubly obliging those who were as abandon'd in Licentiousness as herself, and making an easier Conquest of others, to whom the fear of purchasing their Pleasures at too dear a Rate had been some Check on their vicious Inclinations.

IN this habitude of Sin she had spent seventeen Years, a public Scandal to Man, a Slave to the Devil, and the object of God's Hatred
and

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and Aversion ; when He, yet not forgetting the Prerogative of his Mercy, who being the Father of Mercies desires nothing more than *that the Sinner should turn from his evil Ways and live*, and at whatsoever time he returns to him with the true Repentance of a sincere and contrite Heart is ready with open Arms to receive him to Mercy : This merciful Lord, I say, cast a compassionate Eye on this profligate Prostitute, and projected her Penitence and return to her Duty ; which he graciously brought about on the Occasion and by the Means following.

MARY was now twenty-nine Years of Age, when, upon a Summer's Day, taking an Airing on the Sea Shore, she saw a Concourse of People flocking to a Vessel lying there at Anchor ; she makes up to them, to enquire what was doing : She was told that they were about sailing to *Palestine*, upon a Pilgrimage of Devotion, to celebrate the approaching annual Festival of the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross*, in *Jerusalem*, where the sacred Wood was kept and held in great Veneration. Mary's Heart was too much corrupted and captivated to Sin, at that Time, to enter into the holy Sentiments of this pious Association ; she entertained no
other

other Thoughts of it than that it was a favourable Opportunity of making a Party of criminal Pleasure, and that out of so many People, young and old, she might be able to decoy some into her wicked Snares. But her gracious God had, even then, while her Heart was wholly averse from him, merciful Designs upon her; and this Incident was the Prelude to her future Conversion. In the mean while, without further Demur, she joins with the Company and confidently boards the Vessel, tho' she had not wherewith to defray her Passage.

THEY no sooner set Sail than she began to put in Practice her customary deluding Artifices to debauch the Minds and Hearts of her fellow Travellers; and, if some had Virtue enough to baffle all her wicked Endeavours, there were others, whose heat of Youth and natural propensions to Vice, that had only lain smother'd, as it were, under the Ashes, were now rekindled into a Flame, from the Incentives *Mary* subminister'd to 'em by her alluring Words and sinful Example. Thus, while she continued on board, and during their Voyage, she perpetrated all the Abominations the Circumstances

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circumstances of Time, Place and Persons, would admit of.

BEING come to *Jerusalem* she still pursued her customary evil Courses, heaping Sin upon Sin, Abomination on Abomination, and growing daily more harden'd in Evil and more profligate : Nor was she at a loss there, no more than in other great Towns, (where there are always found bad blended with the good) to find out Persons of a libertine Disposition ready to partake in her Disorders.

THE Day of the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross* was now arrived ; the fortunate Day for this wretched Sinner ; the Day on which Almighty God, in his unerring Counsels, had decreed to rescue her out of the Power of Satan and make a Conquest of her Heart to himself. In the mean while she mixed with the People that in Crowds flock'd to the Church to venerate the sacred Instrument of our Redemption ; tho', on her side, bare Curiosity, or more criminal Motives, were her Attractives. Having got, however, to the Church Porch, after several Attempts to enter, she felt herself repulsed by an invisible Force ; and, while the rest of the People were successively crowding in, she found
that,

that, in spite of every Effort she made, she could not advance. The extraordinariness of the Event startled her, and put her upon considering with herself what could be the Cause of it, and why she alone, among so many, should be precluded the Sight of the sacred Wood.

AT that Instant she was illuminated with a supernatural Light, giving her to understand that her enormous Irregularities were the Obstruction to her Entrance into the Sanctuary, and render'd her unworthy to see the H. Cross which she had so often trampled upon, as it were, by her heinous Sins. She, at the same Time, was seized with a salutary Trouble at her deplorable State, and burst into a Flood of Tears; the *Indication*, as well as the *Effect* of a contrite Heart. *Saul*, of a Persecutor of *Christ*, and an outrageous Impugner of his Cause, was not more suddenly made a Vessel of Election, than *Mary* now, of a profligate Prostitute, became a perfect Penitent.

LIFTING up her Eyes she espied, fixed upon the Porch, a Picture or Image of the Blessed *Virgin*, and recollecting what she had often heard of her unspotted Purity, of the powerful Interest she had with her Blessed *Son*, and
that

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that she was the Refuge of Sinners and Mother of Mercy ; with an entire Confidence in her Intercession, she prostrated before the Figure ; and, by a fervent Prayer to this great Advocate of Sinners it represented, conjured her to be propitious to her in her present Distress and Desolation ; to obtain for her the Forgiveness of her Sins, and, in Consequence to this *Obstacle* removed, the Divine Permission for her to enter into the Church, to see and reverence the sacred Instrument of her Redemption ; promising, on her Part, to do all that should be required of her in order to appease and satisfy the Divine Justice. Having finished her Prayer, she returned with a pious Confidence of Success to the Church Door, and now made her Way in without any further Resistance. An awful Dread seized her, at first, upon her Entrance into the Sanctuary ; she, however, approached the Holy *Wood* ; she reverently worshiped it, and at the same Moment found her Soul replenished with an unexperienced Lightness of Heart, an assured Trust of God's gracious Pardon of her manifold Sins and Abominations, and an interior Consolation which she had never felt before. She returns to the Place where the blessed Virgin's

gin's Picture was fixed ; she a second Time prostrates before it, giving the Mother of God respectful and grateful Thanks for the Favour just obtained thro' her Intercession ; and having found her already so efficacious an Advocate in her behalf, she entreated her to continue her powerful Influence at the Throne of Mercy, by letting her know the Divine Will, where and how she was to accomplish her promised Repentance. In the same Instant, as *Saul*, when he cried out *Lord what wilt thou have me to do*, [*Acts c. 9. v. 6.*] was directed by an unknown Voice to go to *Damascus* ; so *Mary* heard a Voice speaking to her as it were from some distance, saying to her, *Go beyond the River Jordan, where you shall find your Repose and Place of Residence*. She received the Directions as an Order from Heaven, and without any Demur or Consultation about the Difficulty of the Undertaking, or how it was to be put in Execution, went straight out of *Jerusalem*, taking with her only three Loaves, which she purchased with an Alms a charitable Person had given her, for the Provision for her Journey to her uncertain Place of Abode.

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THE same Evening she arrived at the Banks of the River *Jordan*, where was a Church dedicated to St. *John Baptist* : Having, therefore, first washed her Feet and Face, already bedewed with Tears, in the Waters of that sanctified River, she spent all that Night in the Church awake in Prayer, bewailing her Sins ; she confessed them penitently the next Morning, and received the Holy Eucharist as a better *Viaticum* for her Journey, as a fortifying Grace to confirm her in her generous Resolution, and as a Weapon and Buckler to defend her against the Attacks of her spiritual Enemy. She renews again her Addresses to the Blessed Virgin, humbly beseeching the Queen of Heaven not to desert the poor wretched Creature whom she had so manifestly taken under her Protection, but to be ever propitious to her Undertaking, which she had entered upon by her Call and Direction.

HAVING thus discharged her Duty to God, and strengthened her Soul with the spiritual Food of Life ; she next gives a small Refreshment to her Body, which was Half of one of her Loaves, taking it upon the Bank of the River, and with the Water thereof, for her Drink,

Drink, washing it down: A poor Repast in itself, but yet a Dainty in Comparison of what she was to feed upon thereafter.

THUS fortified in Soul and Body she gets up, and courageously pursues her Journey, whither Providence, into whose Arms she had wholly abandoned herself, and the Blessed Virgin, whom she had taken for her Guide, should direct her; fully confident within herself that being so safely escorted she could not miss her Road. With this Reliance on Heaven, and an unparallel'd Resolution on her own side, she makes her Way into the Defart, till after long and painful Marches of several Days, having penetrated deep into the Thickest of it, quite Remote from all seemingly possible Commerce and Communication with her own Species, she conceived that this was the *resting Place* God had appointed for her: Here then she devoted herself anew and perpetually to his divine Service; here she fixed her abode, a voluntary Exile from the World, and bidding adieu at once and for ever to all human Comforts.

Now, what was the angelical Life she led, and the rigorous Penance she practised in this lonesome Solitude, she gave the first Account thereof

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thereof herself, short and general, to a pious Priest and Recluse, whom Almighty God providentially brought to her a little while before she died, as we shall see in the sequel of her Story; tho' even the very Circumstances of her Way of Life was such as to make it evident that it was something more than human. What we have learnt from her own Account is in Substance as follows :

HER Cloaths, which she took with her upon her Back, being in a short Time rotted and fallen to Pieces, she had no other Raiment than what Nature had given her ; in which Condition she was afterwards discovered, and thereby had incredible Hardships to support, as she confessed herself, from the inclemency of the Weather, and from Heat and Cold in the alteration of the Seasons.

As to her Food ; after she had consumed her remaining small Provision of Bread, which she made to hold out for a considerable Time, she had nothing else to subsist on but the wild Herbage which the Desert afforded.

BUT the greatest Difficulties she had to struggle with, in the beginning of her fright-
B 2 ful

ful Retirement, proceeded from the inward dreadful Combats she was engaged in from the Stings of the Flesh, Temptations of Gluttony, and the Powers of Satan, who was become desperate from his Prey being snatched out of his Claws; one whom he had accounted to be surely his own; not only as his Captive, and a Victim to Sin herself, but also as being subservient to his malignant Attempts upon others. The Loss was so considerable, that he set all his Engines to work in order to recover it, by frightening her at one Time with the seeming Impossibility of going on with the Undertaking she had engaged in; at others endeavouring to divert her from it, by enkindling in her the Flames of Concupiscence; by throwing before her the alluring Baits of sensual Pleasures, in which till then she had been wholly immersed, and to which she found herself now, as to a Load-Stone, almost irresistibly Attracted: The Images of her former Irregularities and amorous Dalliances were presented fresh to her Mind; and a long Habit of Sin and Licentiousness was not to be shaken off at once, but with much Labour, Struggle and Difficulty. The Passion of Love had hampered her fast in its Chains,
not

not to be easily broke ; she had long groaned under its Bondage, insensible of her Misery : For such is the Nature of this Passion, above all others, treacherous and fatal to its Votaries ; it betrays while it caresses 'em ; Serpent-like, it glides into their Bosom gently, concealing Poison in its Sting that gives certain Death, tho' insensibly ; *to wit*, insinuating at its first Appearance, in Order to gain Admittance, a Tyrant when in Possession ; at the End Ruin and Perdition. Where Love has made a Conquest, it claims an absolute Empire ; it would rule without control ; like Death, bearing all before it ; it being said, *Strong as Death is Love*. [Cant. 8. 6.] Its Object, for being absent, is not theless present to the Imagination : Love paints in the liveliest Colours, and oftentimes works up Fancy to Delirium and Distraction.

No one could have more Experience of all the dismal Effects of the Tyranny of Love than *Mary* ; and no one, on her becoming a Penitent, could be more serious, determined and successful, in getting out of its cruel Thralldom. She flew into the Desert from its treacherous Embraces : She prayed incessantly to be delivered from its cheating Illusions ; and a rigor-

ous Penance was made to atone for a Life of Softness, Delicacy and Pleasure : Yet even so she was not exempt from Love's furious Assaults : It pursued her into her lonesome Solitude, and beset her with all its wily Artifices, and the whole Strength of its Forces ; but in vain : *Mary* stood her Ground, immoveable as a Rock ; nothing dismayed at the frightful Prospect of these many and troublesome Conflicts. Merciful, all-seeing Providence, that had appointed the Desert for her Field of Battle, in conducting her thither, was her Comfort and her powerful Support. The Remembrance of the Flames of Hell, to which she deemed herself, for her manifold Sins, the deserved Victim, contributed to stifle the Flames of Concupiscence. In her greatest Difficulties she constantly flung herself at the Foot of her Crucifix, and sheltered herself within the Wounds of her suffering Saviour. She often called, in her Distress, upon her celestial Advocate, the Blessed *Virgin*, and never without Success : And Almighty God, who had inspir'd her penitential Resolution, confirmed it with his holy Grace.

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WITH this Buckler she felt, what the Apostle had experienced before, that she was enabled to do all Things ; to brave Dangers, to bid Defiance to the joint Confederacy of the Flesh, the World, and diabolical Malice ; and to be enterprizing in her Exercifes of Penance and Virtue. *I can do all Things*, fays the Apostle, *in him who strengthens me.* [*Phil. c. 4: v. 13.*] And on her Side an inviolable Fidelity and Concurrence with thefe divine Succours, by the Practice of the moft heroic and unparallel'd Austerities, gave her at length a complete Victory over herfelf, at the fame Time that it baffled and wholly defeated all the Attempts made upon her by the Powers of Darknefs : A Fidelity, I fay, not faint and fluctuating, but fteady and conftant ; a Virtue and Refolution not of the vulgar Sort, creeping and daf tardly, but proportioned to the furious Affaults of her Spiritual Enemies, and rifing higher from the greatnefs of her Dangers : A Penitence, infine, and Mortification, not as if ſhe was *Beating the Air*, but ſhewing her determined Refolution of taming her Paſſions at any Rate, and bringing the Fleſh under Subjection. For, tho' ſhe had an infinite Source of unavoidable Sufferings to

go through, from the very Nature and Condition of the Way of Life she had entered upon, *viz.* as I said before, from Hunger, Thirst, the Inclemency of the Seasons, parching Heats in Summer, and pinching Colds in Winter, being exposed naked to the open Air, without Cover or Shelter, which she supported with incredible Patience, and a Courage more than human ; yet to these she added also all the voluntary Mortifications the Horror of the Place furnished her with Opportunities of Practising, or that her pious Ingenuity, egged on by the Spirit of Penance, could contrive and invent : *To wit,* She deemed herself to be her own greatest Enemy, in having been guilty of many heinous Sins, and her Body the Instrument of 'em ; and therefore waged a perpetual, irreconcilable War against it.

Thus, by taming her Flesh with Stripes, by bearing with unwearied Patience the Rigours and Austerities annexed to her Condition and Place of Abode ; by prostrating herself on the Ground, beating her Breast ; by Watchings and Fastings that were continual ; by raising her Heart to Heaven in fervent Prayer and inflamed Aspirations, and by bewailing her past sinful
Life

Life in Floods of Tears, she at length obtained a perfect Calm of Mind, and a Fulness of Spiritual Comforts and interior Consolations succeeded to Aridity, Temptations and Dereliction.

S E C T. III.

Her providential Discovery in the Desert, after seven and forty Years penitential Retirement, by Zosimus, a holy Abbot; to whom she gave an Account as well of her worldly as of her penitential Life.

MARY had passed seven and forty Years in this rigid State of Penance, a voluntary Exile from all human Society, when Almighty God, not permitting such a rare Example of true Penitence, and of a faithful Correspondence with his Divine Grace, to lie any longer concealed, disposed her Discovery in the following Manner :

THERE was a holy Priest and Abbot, called *Zosimus*, who had also led a penitential Life, retired from the World above fifty Years, in a Monastery, when a Thought of Vanity entered into his Mind, that none living had arrived to that Perfection, in the Course of Virtue and Penance,

which

which he himself had attained to : But Almighty God graciously vouchsafed to rid him of this troublesome Temptation, by bringing him to the Sight and Knowledge of *St. Mary of Egypt*. It was customary for some of the pious Recluses of those Days, at every Revolution of the holy Season of Lent, to quit their own Cells and Monasteries, to look out for a stricter Retirement, in order to give themselves up to a straiter Union with God in Prayer, Recollection and Penance ; and it pleased his infinite Goodness, for the Humiliation of *Zosimus* and Exaltation of *Mary*, on one of these Occasions, to direct his Course to the Desert beyond *Jordan*. Here, after wandering twenty Days, being at that Term about the sixth Hour in Prayer, he thought he saw something at a Distance move erect, like a human Body : It proved to be *Mary* ! But so disfigured with her long, lank Hairs, as white as Wool, falling below her Shoulders, her naked Flesh scorched with the Sun, and emaciated with forty-seven Years rigorous Penance, that he had a difficulty to discover it to be a human Figure : However, advancing by large Paces towards her, he began to suspect it might be some Servant of God ;
but

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but as he drew nearer she still retired, 'till conjuring her by loud Cries, in the Name of God, if she was his Servant, to let him approach: She upon this, having first got under some Kind of Cover, made a stop, and calling him by his Name, said to him: "Why, oh! Abbot Zosimus, are you so earnest to come to a wretched, sinful Woman? But since such is your Desire, fling me your Cloak; for you see I am without Cloathing." When the good old Man heard her call him by his Name, which he was sure she could have from none but God himself, he was satisfied she was his Servant, and one highly favoured of Heaven. Having therefore readily flung his Cloak to her, they advanced to each other, both falling on their Knees to beg one another's Blessing. This she declined on her Side to give, alleging that he being a Priest, and offering daily the immaculate Lamb of God upon the Altar, and she only a sinful Woman, the Office of Blessing belonged to him. This further Knowledge of his Character, which she could only have from Inspiration, raised still his Idea of her great Favour with God. He however entreated her to offer up a Prayer for him

him to the Almighty, whom they mutually served : This she consenting to, retired from him a few Paces, when he beheld her in Prayer elevated above a Cubit from the Ground. At this Sight, struck with a sacred Dread, he fell prostrate on his Face, imagining with himself that it was an angelic Spirit in human Shape, and not a Woman, he had met with : But she, returning to him, raised him up, saying :
“ What are these Fancies, Father *Zosimus*, you
“ entertain ? I am not a Spirit, as you ima-
“ gine, but your fellow Creature, and a sinful
“ Woman, as I have already told you.

HE being, now, in no further Doubt concerning her Condition, assumed Courage, and frankly entreated her to tell him what had induced her to enter upon such an extraordinary Course of Penance ; and desired her to give him a Detail of her Life ; conjuring her, in the sacred Name of God, to conceal nothing of it from him. She, nevertheless, would willingly have declined relating to him the sinful Part of it ; telling him it had been so abominable, that the very Remembrance thereof gave her Shame and Confusion ; that a mere Recital must strike him with Horror, and her Words infect the Air
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that environ'd'em: However, for her own Humiliation, she at last acquiesced to his importunate Requests, telling him all the Particulars till her miraculous Call to Repentance, and her Entrance at first into the Defart, as in Substance by us above narrated; concluding, that the real Deformity of her Life had so far exceeded the Picture of it she had given him, that she could not recollect Almighty God's unwearied Patience with her, during her seventeen Years Prostitution, but with the utmost Confusion; that it was through his great Mercy He withheld the Hands of the Mariners from casting her overboard at Sea; that the Earth had not frequently opened to swallow her up, or the Elements, and all the brutal Creation, had not confederated to her Destruction.

HAVING brought her Narration to the Period of her sinful Life, and of Almighty God's merciful and miraculous Call of her to Repentance, the good old Man was now still more earnest to be informed of the Particulars of her penitential one; for it seemed to him, he said, Providence had brought them together that he might be acquainted with the whole State of her Soul, to his own great Edification, and for
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the Instruction of many. And first, he was curious to know whether the Alteration of her Condition of Life, from an Extream of Vice to that of Penance, was not attended with Difficulties internal as well as external; for he conceived the inward Conflicts of the Spirit could not be less troublesome to her than her outward Sufferings. To this she directly replied, That indeed they had been so great, and so surpassing human Weakness, but for the singular Grace of God which supported her, that tho' He had mercifully brought her through 'em, and the Dangers were past, yet the bare Remembrance of 'em made her shudder, and her Blood chill; that from the Stings of the Flesh, and the Flames of Concupiscence, which were continual, she experienced what the Apostle had felt before, *A Law in her Members fighting against the Law of her Mind*, [Rom. 7. v. 23.] which would allow her no rest or quiet; that the Picture of her former dissolute Life, her criminal Amours in Words and Actions, and her sinful Dalliances, were painted in such lively Colours to her Imagination, as even the frightful Horror of her Solitude, joined to her Sighs, Prayers, Tears, knocking her Breast and prostrating upon the Ground,

St. MARY of EGYPT. 31

Ground, were not able to efface ; and if Almighty God now and then did give her a Flash of Respite, the Temptations presently redoubled upon her with greater Fury : That she was often sollicitated to seek her Repose by yielding to the Temptation, and to look out for a Refuge in the carnal Pleasures which she had renounced ; and that to be sure nothing else but the powerful Force of Divine Grace supported her under such rugged Trials, and rendered her sufficient to weather the raging Storms. That at other Times her spiritual Enemy, personating an Angel of Light, attempted to shake her Resolution by Suggestions of a more plausible Nature ; insinuating to her that she was led out of the Way by a mistaken Virtue ; that the State of Penance she had entered upon was extravagant and unprecedented ; that there were many holy Penitents living in the World, or in Religious Communities, to whom she might associate herself without Prejudice to her Devotion, in a Method of Life equally pleasing to Almighty God, and by their Example and under the Advice of prudent Directors, with more safety to her Soul, than by running headlong her own Way, and following the blind, impetuous

impetuous Impulses of a wild Imagination, in living separate from all Commerce with the Wife, the Good and the Virtuous. But, thanks to God, she said, all the subtle Sophistry of the Enemy was too weak to over-rule his Divine Will, manifested to her in a miraculous Manner, directing her into the Desert, and plainly telling her that there she was to find her Place of Rest : That it was not able to stifle the inward Voice of Heaven, incessantly repeating to her that she should continue in that Solitude, removed from all Commerce with the World. That, however, it did not please God to deliver her from these furious Temptations and deluding Artifices of the Enemy, in a continual State of Aridity, Desolation and Dereliction, till she had gone through a seventeen Years Penance, in a perpetual Combat and State of Violence, to atone for her seventeen Years Dissolution. But since that Time his gracious Goodness, who is a bountiful Rewarder, had restored to her a perfect Calm, and replenished her Soul with a Joy beyond what she was able to express ; and had, infine, given her an hundredfold here, as an Earnest of the
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St. MARY of EGYPT. 33

eternal Weight of Glory she was in expectation of hereafter.

MARY would here have concluded her Story, but the good old Man was not to be contented till she had gone through the other Circumstances of her rigid Penance with respect to her Want of Apparel and Food. To this she replied, That, when the Cloaths she had brought on her Back had rotted off, she had much to suffer from Wind, Rain, Heat and Cold; but that in Length of Time she found the Grace and Virtue of GOD a sufficient Raiment and Defence against all the Injuries of the Weather: That, as to her Food, she had for a considerable Time subsisted upon her Loaves, which being become as hard as Stones, she ground together into a Powder, afterwards living upon the wild Herbs the Defart afforded, but mostly on the Word of GOD: For *Man*, said she, *does not feed on Bread alone, but upon every Word that comes from the Mouth of GOD.* [Matth. c. 4. v. 4.] Zosimus expressing here his Surprise at her having Scripture so familiar, she said, That indeed she was wholly unlearned; and, having seen no Man since her Retirement, she could not from thence have received any Instructions; but that

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GOD was self-sufficient to teach us all Knowledge. She then imparted to him some secret Informations which she could only have learnt from Divine Inspiration ; *viz.* that there were some Irregularities that had crept into a neighbouring Monastery under the Direction of one Abbot *John*, which it behoved him to admonish him of, and to bid him, on the Part of GOD, to correct 'em ; and upon a Visitation the Abbot afterwards made of his Monastery, it proved to be according to the Advice the Saint had sent him. She also foretold *Zosimus*, That the Year ensuing he would be detained at home by Sickness from making his Excursion at the usual Time ; that nevertheless he would be in a Condition by the End of *Lent* to come as far as the River *Jordan*, to which Place she entreated him to bring with him the Blessed Eucharist on *Maunday-Thursday*, where she would give him the Meeting, in order to partake of that divine Banquet, which the Circumstances of her forty-seven Years strict Retirement had laid her under an insuperable Necessity of being debarred of all that Space of Time, since her last Communion in the Church of St. *John*, just at her Entrance into the Desert.

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St. MARY of EGYPT. 35

IT may here be expected we should vindicate our Saint from the Imputation of being led away by the Spirit of Illusion, in taking up with a Method of Life that deprived her of these powerful Means of Grace, prescribed us by our Blessed Lord himself, for the Food of our Soul when hungry, for our Comfort when under Affliction, and as an effectual Bulwark to defend us against the Storms of Temptation.

AND to this no more, to be sure, can be said, than that as Almighty God gratuitously bestows his Gifts, so he may, if he pleases, take 'em from us, or suspend our Enjoyment of 'em ; as is often the Case when Persons, by some invincible Impediment (as by Lunacy, or from an Indisposition of Body, Almighty God so permitting it) are rendered incapable of approaching to the sacred Mysteries.

IN the like manner, so often as Almighty God, in his unsearchable Wisdom, calls his Servants to a recluse Life, whether by inward Inspiration, as he called St. *Paul* the Hermit and others, or by an outward Voice, wherewith St. *Mary* of *Egypt* was favoured, putting it past all Doubt that such was his Divine Will and Pleasure, they being in these Circumstances removed from

the Opportunities of partaking corporally of the sacred Food, it cannot be questioned but that Almighty God on one Side dispenses them with the Obligation, and on the other will retrieve their Loss, by assisting them with an extraordinary Overflow of his holy Grace towards a fervent spiritual Communion in Affection and Desire, which can't fail of being highly acceptable to him and meritorious to themselves. Such, it may be presumed, were the inflamed Affections and Desires of *Mary*, which it pleased Almighty God to reward at the last, with affording her the Happiness of receiving not spiritually only, but also corporally her Blessed Lord before she died, as we are agoing to hear. Therefore, to resume the Thread of our Story, this great Point being gained, *viz.* a Promise from *Zosimus* of bringing to her the Divine Banquet, she next requires of him inviolable Secrecy to all she had just related to him, so long as it should please God to detain her in this Prison of her Body; and he in his Turn requesting her Prayers for himself and the whole Church, they thus parted for the present, mutually comforted, and overwhelmed with interior Joy and Consolation: *Mary* transported, on her Side,
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SA. MARY of EGYPT. 37

at the certain Prospect of receiving into her Breast her Blessed Lord in the Sacrament, whom she had faithfully served, ardently loved, and impatiently longed for during her forty-seven Years penitential Retirement; *Zosimus* equally comforted, edified and instructed, on his Part, by being favoured with the Sight of such an eminent Example of inimitable Penitence and consummate Virtue : And now thoroughly humbled and disabused of his vain Conceits of his own Merits, which he found to fall so many Degrees short of *Mary's* ; with these low Sentiments of himself, and admiration of *Mary*, so much favour'd and distinguished by Heaven, he sets out, making the best of his Way to his Monastery, wanting no further Subject for his Meditations, nor to rouse his Fervor, than what he had gather'd from his Conversation with this holy Penitent.

S E C T. IV.

She receives the Holy Communion from Zosimus's Hands. Her Death and Burial.

MA R Y now also retires within herself, to make due Preparations towards receiving the eucharistical Blessing, which, what they were, is more than my Pen is able to describe : It may be said that she redoubled, if it were possible, her Fervor, and enter'd, if it may be called so, on a new Life ; that is, a Life still more spiritual and angelical. In the mean While, on the Revolution of the Year, *Zosimus*, tho' detained at Home by Sickness all the Lent, (as she had predicted) was well enough to come out, according to Agreement, on *Maunday-Thursday*, bringing with him the H. Eucharist, as desired. Being arrived at the Banks of the River *Jordan*, he was under some Perplexity whether he should wait her coming, or whether she, perhaps, having already been there, he had not better seek a Passage over to go after her. Whilst he was in this Suspence with himself how to proceed, he espied her by the Moonshine, covered with the Cloak
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he had lent her, on the other Side ; the Difficulty was yet how they should get to one another, when he sees her making the Sign of the Cross on the Water, and confidently coming towards him, walking upon it as if it had been dry Land. At this Sight he would have prostrated to beg her Prayers, but she would not permit him, reminding him of his own Character, and the sacred Pledge he had about him. But first thanking him for his Charity, in bringing to her the ineffable Blessing, she desires him to join with her in Prayer to prepare for it ; then receiving her Blessed Lord, with a Faith, Respect, Fervor and Devotion proportioned to her enflamed Love and longing Desire of him, in an Extasy of Joy she breaks out into the Exclamation of holy Simeon, *Now, O Lord, dismiss thy Servant, according to thy Word, in Peace ; because mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation.* [Luke, c. 2. v. 29, 30.] Her Devotions ended, and her Soul replenished with an accumulation of Grace from the intimate Presence of her Saviour within her Breast, they joined in a mutual Thanksgiving for the great Favour conferred upon her. The good old Man would then fain have prevail'd upon her to take a

small Present of Dates, Figs and Lentils he had brought with him for her corporal Refection ; but she contented herself, not to reject entirely his Benevolence, with taking out of his Sack two or three Lentils, telling him, as she had the Year before, that the Grace of God was a sufficient Raiment and Food to those that love him.

SHE now takes leave of him for the second Time ; but, at parting, requests him to return once more the following Year to the Place in the Defart where he had first discovered her ; telling him he should then find her in that State and Condition as would be agreeable to the Almighty ; for that it was his Will and Pleasure she should continue and finish her Course in the Method of Life she had begun ; insinuating by this obscure Hint, which he did not then rightly comprehend, that her End was near at Hand, as the Event afterwards proved ; and that therefore the Blessed Eucharist she had just received, was her *Viaticum* for that mortal Passage. She, then, making the Sign of the Cross upon the Water, passed over it dry-footed, as she had done before ; God shewing, by this sovereign Power he gave her over
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the Element, the great Favour she was in with him. *Zosimus* also took his Rout homewards, confirmed in the high Idea he had conceived of *Mary's* Sanctity, and greatly edified and inflamed by her celestial Conversation; but afflicted that, in these several Interviews, he had always forgot to ask her Name. However, he hoped to retrieve that Omission at the next Meeting, and thought the Time long till he was to enjoy a Repetition of that much-wish'd-for Happiness. Effectually the Year was no sooner come about, but he set out from his Monastery, under the Appearance of looking out for his customary Retirement, but in the Main to recover the Treasure he had left behind him the Year before. He had been bewildered in the thickest of the Desert for several Days, with an impatient but fruitless Search after the holy Penitent, when on a sudden, being providentially conducted near the Place, he saw it encompassed with a heavenly Glory, shining brighter than the Sun in its Meridian on the clearest Day; and coming up, he beheld the Corpse of the Saint lying prostrate and motionless on the Ground, her Face turned towards the East, with these Words written in the Sand by her, " Abbot *Zosimus*, bury here
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“ the Body of sinful, miserable *Mary* ; render
“ to the Earth what belongs to it ; put Dust to
“ Dust, and pray for her Soul, which departed
“ hence the 9th of *April*, the Day that our Lord
“ died for me.” By this Token he both learnt
her Name, and understood that Almighty God
had taken her to himself on *Good-Friday*, the Day
after she had communicated at his Hands, receiv-
ing her Blessed Lord *sacramentally* as a Prepara-
tion and Prelude to her Possessing him in *Glory*.
And the holy Man recalling to Mind what she
had hinted to him at parting the last Interview,
tho’ not then by him understood, was not greatly
surprised to find her in that State ; but falling on
his Knees, he first kissed her Feet ; then, ac-
cording to the Custom of the Church, said the
Office of the Dead over her, at the same Time
recommending himself internally to her Prayers,
whom, after a Life of such exemplar Penance,
he could not doubt of being cleansed from all
Stain of Sin, and gone to receive her just Re-
ward. But, as he was under some Perplexity
how to make a Grave, in which to lay her
Body, a Lion comes running up with great
Speed, which immediately fell a licking the
Feet of the Saint ; by this Token *Zosimus* con-
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cluding that it was sent thither by Providence to assist him in the Discharge of the Funeral Duty, making the Sign of the Cross, and nothing daunted, he commanded the Animal to scrape a Hole to receive the Body ; it instantly obeyed his Orders ; he decently put the Corpse into the Ground ; and, having completed the rest of the funeral Obsequies, the Animal scraped back the Earth upon her, and tamely went its Way : And *Zosimus* taking up the shattered Cloak he had lent the holy Penitent at their first Meeting, which he ever after kept as a precious Relick for having been in the Saint's Use, he also returned to his Monastery.

BEING got Home, he thought himself, now she was dead, fully disengaged from his Promise of Secresy to her, and rather under an Obligation of making public so rare an Example of inimitable Penitence : He tells all he had seen and learnt ; every one was astonished beyond Measure, and, nothing doubting of her being in the State of Glory, they indicted an annual Festival in her Memory, under the Name of *St. Mary the Egyptian Penitent*.

SOPHRONIUS, Bishop of *Jerusalem* presently after, from *Zosimus's* Memoirs wrote the Story
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of her Life, recorded by *Nicephorus Callistus* in the seventeenth Book, fifth Chapter, of his History, translated by *Paulus Diacomus*, a *Neapolitan*. This Account of her Life is taken Notice of, and approved, in the fourth Act of the second Council of *Nice*, and by St. *John Damascene* in his third Oration *de Imaginibus*, and by the Martyrologies of the *Latin Church*. She died in the Time of *Justinian* the elder, *Anno 520*. The *Roman Martyrology* fixes her Feast on the second of *April*, the *Greek Menologe* on the first ; tho' her Death was, as we have seen above, on the ninth ; and *Zosimus*, from whom we have the original Account of our Saint, died himself in Odour and Reputation of Sanctity, and his Feast is fixed by the Church on the fourth of *April*. St. *Mary of Egypt* is also honourably mentioned, and the History of her wonderful Life, by the Authors aforesaid, referred to by the great Church-Historian *Baronius*, in his Annotations on the Martyrology, and in the seventh Tome of his Annals.

S E C T. V.

A Review of her wonderful Life, with Respect to the Mercies and Favours of GOD to her ; and her own faithful Correspondence with them : With a Vindication of her Story from the Cavils of Sceptics, and the Incredulous.

SUCH, as we have seen, was the extraordinary Life and Saint-like End of this illustrious Penitent ; in which there occurs great Matter of Instruction, much to imitate, and all to be admired.

THE unwearied Patience of Almighty GOD with her in the dissolute Part of her Life, when she abandoned herself, without Reserve, up to Sin and Licentiousness, grounds an Encouragement to every Sinner, how dissolute soever his own Life may have been, not to despair, if he do but return to GOD in due Time by a sincere Repentance ; because he may be sure, from the Mercy shewn to *Mary*, that the Bowels of Mercy will be also open to him ; for GOD said, by the Prophet *Ezekiel*, *I will not the Death of the Sinner, but that he be converted from his evil Ways, and live :* [*Ezek. c. 33. v. 11.*] And, as a further Heartening
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to miserable Delinquents to pluck up their Courage, and not to be cast down at the Sight of the Multitude and Enormity of their Transgressions, he adds by the Prophet *Isaiah*, That, *tho' their Sins be as Scarlet, they shall become white as Snow; tho' they be red as Crimson, they shall be made white as Wool: [Isaiah c. 1. v. 18.]* to wit, The Treasury of his Graces are infinite and inexhaustible, and their Power great, and (as it were) invincible; but it is only to those, who, by a prompt Return to their Duty, are willing to accept of his gracious Tender of Mercy; not to them who by presumptuous Delays abuse it, and therefore render themselves unworthy of it.

THRICE fortunate *Mary*! to whom this Grace of Mercy was given, and who was enabled to say with the Apostle, *that it was not given in vain*; when, in an Instant, her Heart, from being wholly carnal and worldly, was so changed, as to be quite spiritual and celestial; when from a profligate Prostitute, she became a perfect Penitent; and, from abandoning herself up to the profane Love of Creatures, she was suddenly enamoured of God alone, and entirely devoted to his divine Service. The Conversion of the
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Thief on the Cross from a Blasphemer of *Christ* to become his Encomiast, or of *Saul* from a Persecutor changed into a Professor of his Law and an Apostle, were not more sudden or effectual. But if Almighty God, on these Occasions, is seen to be so prodigal in the Profusion of his extraordinary Graces upon his chosen Servants, they are also found in them not to have been fruitless : And, with regard to our holy Penitent in particular, we have heard her faithful Correspondence with the celestial Illuminations ; her heroic Courage and Resolution ; her great Compunction and Contrition for her Sins ; her rigid Penance and final Perseverance. Grace and Mercy on the Part of the Creator, and Fidelity on the Part of the Creature, must necessarily be reciprocal and concurring in order to raise a perfect spiritual Edifice : For *He*, says St. *Austin*, *that created us without our Aid, will not save us without our mutual Concurrence and effectual Endeavours.* [St. *Aug.* Conf.]

BUT the OEconomy of Blessed *Mary's* Penitence, and the Analogy or Resemblance it carried to her worldly Life, particularly deserve our Attention. *Mary*, after her Conversion, was, thro' the powerful Influence of Divine Grace,

Grace, so wonderfully changed, as to become wholly a new Woman ; but it was by correcting her Passions, and by giving them a new Frame and a different Direction, rather than by giving them up entirely (if I may be allowed to speak in this manner) : For tho' the irregular and sinful Part of her Passions were by Grace certainly eradicated out of her Soul, yet the Passions themselves may, in some Degree, be said rather to have changed their Object than to have left her. For Instance : The Passion of Love, implanted in her Soul, of sensual and terrene became spiritual and divine ; from Creatures was converted to the Creator. Her natural vivacity of Temper, which had made her bold and daring in the Practice of Vice, was afterwards concurring with Divine Grace to render her intrepid in her spiritual Warfare, heroic in her Enterprises, undaunted at Difficulties, and in her Resolutions inflexible. We have observed her, for Example, in the beginning of Life hurried away by the liveliness of her Imagination, quitting her Father's House, going to a strange Place, there, in her impotent Infancy, as I may call it, to shift for herself, without Foresight, Consideration, or regard to
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the Difficulties that were inevitably to attend the chimerical Undertaking : And, when she was made a Convert to Almighty God by Grace, she, with an equal Unreservedness, throws herself into the Arms of Providence, and enters on a Scheme of Life unexperienced, and seemingly impracticable, with three Loaves, (the Provision for a few Days) beginning a Career which was to last many Years. In her sinful Life the love of Pleasure was her ruling and predominant Passion, to which Interest and every other Consideration gave way ; and perpetual Dissipations, Company and Diversifements, which she immoderately fought after, were the Means she made use of to accomplish her inordinate Desires, on which she put no Check or Restraint ; but returning to Almighty God, she steer'd the opposite Course : Her Heart had been before most violently fet upon Creatures, now on her Creator ; in retiring into a lonesome Desert, by a voluntary Banishment from all human Society, she effectually parted with the Means and Occasions of gratifying her irregular Appetites ; and, not to tire the Reader with an unnecessary Repetition of her many voluntary Austerities, it is certain that the very Method of Life she had enter'd upon

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was inseparable from a continual Penance and Mortification, and *that* the most rigid, and humanly insupportable.

AND indeed this Consequence, supposing the Truth of the Premises, is so uncontestable, and the whole Tenor of this holy Penitent's Life (as observed in the Advertisement) is so much of the marvellous, that it may be thought we have most Occasion to clear up her History from the Imputation of Fiction, and to support it's Credit against the Cavils of the *Wits*, *Critics* and the *Incredulous*; for by Persons of this sceptic Way of Thinking, every Narrative rising above the vulgar Opinion, in setting forth Facts which move out of the common Track, is deemed fabulous and romantic. And very frivolous are the Pretences offer'd by them, to give the Colour of Reason for this incredulous Humour.

THERE are a Set of *Thomas Didymus's*, who affect to disbelieve every Thing that does not come within the Ken of their Senses and their ocular Evidence, and therefore they can scarce prevail on themselves to look upon Facts of an extraordinary Nature, which had fallen out at distant Times, in any other Light than as Apocryphal.

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Apocryphal. But it is certain, were this Humour of judging of past Events to deserve any Regard, the Credit of History, *prophane* as well as *revealed*, would sink into Fable, and the Foundation both of Human and Divine Faith be supplanted. Our Belief resting also on this weak Basis, our own ocular Evidence, there is not a Consequence so absurd which would not ensue from it: We might question the being of such a Man as *Julius Cæsar*, or whether *Rome* had ever been Mistress of the World, as she is celebrated in History, since there remain at present no Traces of her Power; the Race of it's People is wholly extinct, and even their Language dead, and no where generally made use of. Such are the monstrous Consequences these Triflers lay themselves open to, through an over-weening fond Affectation of not appearing too credulous!

THERE are Infidels of another Kind, who are as difficult in giving their Assent to the Divine Mysteries, because transcending Nature; and to miraculous Operations, because acting contrary to it: And in this Conduct they, no doubt, offer Violence to the Divine Attributes, while they measure omnipotent

Power by human Weakness, and infinite, incomprehensible Wisdom, by their limited, narrow Understandings.

BUT to speak now, directly, to the Cause we have to maintain, there are some others of such a peculiar Humour as to be unwilling to relish Virtues of a superior Degree and Excellency, because they themselves are destitute of them : Therefore the Truth of Histories setting forth Matters of an extraordinary Kind, such as are the mortified Lives and exemplar Penitences of pious Recluses, are by them either called in Question, or turned into Rallery : They think their excessive Rigours irreconcilable to human Prudence, and therefore directly explode them as fabulous and incredible ; but, in very Truth, the unparallel'd Resolution of these penitential Men, and unshaken Fidelity in Almighty God's Service, rather become a Reproach to their own Tepidity, Pusillanimity and Irresolution. They are inclined to think *that* impossible in others which they have not the Heart to venture upon themselves ; not considering the Power of Divine Grace which actuated the Saints, and carried them thro' all their heroic Undertakings,

St. MARY of EGYPT. 53

ings, and the Insufficiency of human Forces divested of this extraordinary Aid.

THAT, therefore, this Method of judging of what is past, or of what is above us, is *unreasonable*, must be confessed by every Man endued with *Reason*. The only Test, then, by which Events, that are of the marvellous and surprising Nature, are to be tried, is, to weigh well the Motives of Credibility accompanying them; the Integrity of the Evidences to the Facts, and the Authenticity of the Records which have transmitted them to us: And, in these Particulars, I will be bold to say, that the History of St. *Mary of Egypt* has been handed down to us so well attested as to be out of the Reach of the most inflexible Scepticism to doubt of the Truth of it, or of the most disingenuous Malice to cavil at it.

THE first Account of our holy Penitent's wonderful Life and Actions was communicated to the World, as we have heard above, by a Person of that Holiness and Simplicity of Manners as placed him out of the reach of any possible Suspicion of Forgery, Design or Confederacy to impose upon us; and whereas he declared he was Eye-witness of some Part of

his Relation, and had the rest from the Saint's own Mouth, there can be no Room to doubt of the Truth of it. Her Acts were presently after compiled into a regular History, by St. *Sophronius*, Bishop of *Jerusalem*, Cotemporary to the Events he wrote, or living soon after, while they were fresh in every one's Memory. And *Nicephorus Callistus*, an early Greek Historian, as we have just heard, mentions this Narrative given by the holy Bishop of *Jerusalem* as authentic, and of the Truth whereof no one doubted. It had, moreover, the Sanction of a General Council's Approbation, and is honourably commemorated by a learned holy Father, in a Dissertation wrote professedly in Vindication of the Catholic Doctrine from the Slanders of the *Iconoclasts*, the Impugners of it, and anathematized Heretics of his Time. And lastly, the exemplar Life of this renowned Penitent, thro' all the future Ages of the Church, has been perpetually recommended to the Admiration and Imitation of her Children, and the History of it, for this Purpose, carefully preserved and faithfully translated into several living Languages.

BUT

St. MARY of EGYPT. 55

BUT if, still, the Nature of this holy Recluse's course of Penance, her strict Retirement and excessive Austerities, are what give a Shock to the Faith of some squeamish Unbelievers, I beg leave to ask, What it is they can find to boggle at, or exceeding Credit therein, of which there are not to be found parallel Examples, unquestionably attested, of latter as well as of early Days? For, to say nothing of a *Paul*, an *Anthony*, a *Simon Stilytes*, and innumerable other Confessors of ancient Times, who were Miracles of Penitence, to whose Histories, on Account of their Antiquity, they may yet object, as they do to the Acts of our Saint, for being Apocryphal; the Church of *Christ* has, thro' the Blessing of God, been always fruitful of Saints eminent for their conspicuous Virtues and exemplar Penance.

THE learned and pious Author of the *Britannia Sancta*, to whom this Part of the Christian World is obliged for daily Tracts of Edification and Instruction; and whose Reputation, for Judgment and good Sense, is too well established to be suspected of giving into an unreasonable Credulity; this worthy Writer, I say, has furnished us with as astonishing Examples

Examples of Penitence, Self-abnegation, and a total Retirement from the World, within these Islands, in a St. *Goderick*, St. *Guthlake*, St. *Keyna* a Royal Virgin, and many more, as any to be met with among the Anchorets of the Desarts of *Egypt* or *Palestine*.

INFINE, were we to recapitulate the whole Course and Tenor of St. *Mary* of *Egypt*'s Life from the Beginning to the End: As to the earlier and irregular Part of it, we need not have recourse to History to find it fully exemplified; and with respect to the penitential One, there is nothing so wonderful in it but of which there are Instances of the same Kind convey'd to us thro' the Channels of Divine Revelation. For, first, I say Almighty God's unwearied Patience with her, during the sinful Part of her Life, is no more than what we are daily Witnesses of with regard to many other Sinners. Next, her miraculous Call to Repentance, by a Voice from Heaven, was what St. *Paul* had been favoured with; was the Way by which that great Light of the Church, St. *Austin*, was called afterwards, and several others recorded in Divine and Ecclesiastical History. Thirdly, the amazing Power
and

and Efficacy of Divine Grace, in working her up to such a steady and inviolable Resolution, was what these Saints had happily experienced within themselves before. And lastly, as to the astonishing Rigour of her Life, her Want of Raiment, and her continual Fasts, *Holy Writ* furnishes us with many Instances of the like excessive Austerities and Abstinence. *Elijah*, in the Virtue of one Loaf of Bread miraculously convey'd to him, fasted forty Days in this same Defart where she pursued her Course of Penitence : *Moses* passed as many Days, without any Sustenance, on the Mount. The Fasts of St. *John Baptist* in the Defart also, as recorded in the Gospels, were continual, and his Austerities excessive. To clench all these Proofs, we need only look back on the two first Sinners and first Penitents, and perhaps the greatest that ever were, *Adam* and *Eve*, whose Life, when drove out of Paradise, exposed to the Inclemency of all the Elements, which revolted against them as they had revolted against their Maker, could be no other than a Chain of Miseries and Afflictions, which they resignedly submitted to ; and likely a perpetual rigorous Fast, not for forty Years, but
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for several Hundred, if not to their Death, and a continual State of the severest Penance. If it be replied that Nature was then in its Vigour, and able to bear more than now; I answer that Grace is above Nature; both one and the other equally the Gift of God, which He can bestow when and where he pleases, as may be convenient for the bringing about the Execution of his Divine Counsels: And his Arm is not shortened. Yet if these revealed Instances of pious Excesses are not sufficient to wrest from our modern Sceptics a confession of their being feasible; if the particular Story of our Saint, as authentically attested as any other Relation from the Ecclesiastical History, does not render it to them credible; leaving them to their Incredulity, I'll address myself to those who may be disposed to give their pious Assent to it, and to benefit from it. Many, by reading the Acts of *Mary's* penitential Life, have effectually been moved to change their own Lives, and to enter upon a State of Penance: It had, with the Grace of God, such an extraordinary Influence upon St. *John Columbinus*, a Gentleman of *Siena*, as to make him not only become a true Penitent, but a Founder of

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a Religious Order called *Jesuati*, and himself also a great Saint. And the like Reflections maturely made by every one else, particularly such as have imitated her in her Dissolutions, can't fail, with the Help of God, which will never be wanting to us, of stirring up in their Hearts a seasonable Desire of Repentance.

S E C T. VI.

St. Mary of Egypt's exemplar Penitence recommended to the Imitation of every habitual Sinner ; since the Practice of Penance is compatible with every State of Life ; is what every one stands in need of, and therefore what no one can be dispensed with.

IF our illustrious Penitent thought it necessary to do so much as we have heard, in order to satisfy the Divine Justice for her Infidelity ; if, to atone for a dissolute Life of a few Years, she went through a voluntary Penance of so long a Time, will other Sinners be dispensed with it ? Can those who have followed, and even, perhaps, outgone her in the Multitude and Heinousness of their Transgressions, hope for Forgiveness, unless with
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her also they repent of 'em ? Hearken to what our Blessed Lord told the *Jews* on this Subject ; *Verily, I say unto you, unless you do Penance for your Sins, ye shall every one of you perish.* [Luke, ch. xiii. v. 3.] The Sinner must therefore sincerely repent of his Sins, if he ever expects to meet with Pardon—Nothing more certain. That is, he must have a thorough Compunction and Contrition for his Iniquities, a Detestation of his past Life, and a Purpose of Amendment : These are the essential Constitutes of true Penance, without which it will be insufficient and vain. With these, as we have seen, our Saint began her Repentance, when, being excluded the Entrance into the Church, she prostrated herself before the Picture of the Blessed Virgin, humbled herself, acknowledged her Guilt and Unworthiness, wept for her Sins, begged Mercy, and had Mercy immediately granted her, being permitted to go into the Sanctuary, and to venerate the sacred Instrument of her Redemption.

To the essential Constitutes of Penance are also to be annexed certain Conditions, as inseparable from a true Repentance as Heat from Fire, or Moistness from what is Liquid ; these
are

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are, to fly from the Occasions of Sin, and to remove every Circumstance that leads to it. This our Saint effectually did by withdrawing from the World, and from all human Society, in the Manner we have heard. I will not indeed say that it is incumbent on every Sinner to do every Thing which she did : A manifest Call from Heaven warranted her uncommon Undertaking ; and without the like evident Call from Heaven, it would be Rashness and Presumption in any one else to enter upon the same Method of Life : Yet, to withdraw so far from the World, that is, from such Company and such Circumstances as were experienced to have been the next Step to a Relapse, and the immediate Cause of it, is not only adviseable, without a Voice from Heaven to call them thereto, but practicable and even indispensable ; and there will be no securing our Virtue upon any other Terms. Had St. *Mary of Egypt* remained in the Occasions that had afforded her the Means of, and Incentives to Sin, she had likely, in spite of her Resolutions of Repentance and Amendment, continued on a Sinner and Impenitent. Pressing Temptations, inviting Objects and prompt Occasions, are no
otherwise

otherwise to be eluded than by flying. *Sampson* neglecting this salutary Precaution, by dallying with the Occasion, was betray'd into his Ruin. *David*, presumptuous, unwary and inconsiderate, became an Adulterer; and, in order to cover his Guilt, added the more heinous one of Murder. And the Wisdom of *Solomon*, from the same Causes, degenerated into Folly, Infatuation and Apostacy. On the other Hand, *Joseph* preserved his Innocence, *Susanna* her Chastity, by wresting themselves resolutely and briskly out of the Hands of their violent Invaders. And the Alternative must also be the inevitable Consequence of the respective Deportment of every one else engaged in the like Circumstances; viz. either to fall in the Danger, by rashly running into the Mouth of it, or to triumph over it by flying from it. Therefore the first Prelude to a sincere Conversion from Sin is, confessedly, to shun its Occasions.

THERE are also certain Marks of a Repentance being sincere and real, by which *Mary's* Repentance was eminently distinguished; and by the same is every Penitent to try and measure his own. Of these Marks one is, that a Sinner,

ner, seriously determined upon returning to his Duty to his great Creator, throws himself without Reserve into his Divine Arms, to be formed by him into an interior and spiritual Man, by a total Change of his Heart, by new moulding his Passions, and correcting their Deformity and Irregularity ; because, as has been observed above relatively to our holy Penitent, her Passions may, in some Manner, be said not so much to have left her, as to have changed their Object : *To wit*, If she was impetuous and violent in her worldly Undertakings, she was not less fervent upon her Conversion in the Practices of Penance, when she abandoned herself up to Providence for her Guide : If Pleasures were before her Pursuit, Rigours and Mortification were adopted in their Stead : To make Amends for her Passion after Company, she made Choice of an absolute Retirement ; and an inflamed Love of God took Place of her Love of Creatures. And in these Particulars every other Sinner is enabled to tread so closely her Steps in the Paths of Virtue, and to transcribe her Life of Penance into their own, as they had copied her Dissolutions ; and they are indispensably obliged to do it.

BUT

BUT the Punishment of Sin is to be deemed the principal Mark of the Sincerity of our Repentance, and is a Condition, without which Penitence is seldom lasting, and is a Debt of Justice to Almighty God, which, if not voluntarily discharged by the Sinner in this Life, will be demanded of him, with Interest, in the next; where, to his Sorrow, he will be sensible of the Difference betwixt one and the other. We are apt to look upon St. *Mary of Egypt's* OEconomy of Penance as a pious Excess and Extravagance; yet, believe me, it comes infinitely short of the least Punishment inflicted on the Souls in Hell, or even in Purgatory; where, as the pious *Thomas a Kempis* says, *One Hour in Torment is more than an hundred Years spent here in the severest Penance.* [*Tho. Kemp. l. 1. ch. 24.*] However, I own, as I said before, that our Saint did execute this Act of Justice upon herself with so much Rigour, as would be Temerity and Indiscretion in another to attempt the same, without a like miraculous Call to inspire his Resolution, and an extraordinary Help from Heaven to aid him to execute it. I do not, therefore, advise every Sinner to embrace her strict Retirement, her continual
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• and unavoidable Fasts, and miraculous Self-denials ; but every one, within his own State and Condition, has daily Means offered him of making Atonement for his Sins to the Divine Justice, even exclusively of Works of Supererogation ; as married People in the Government of their Family, in Rearing up their Children, in bearing with Contradictions, inseparably annexed to their State : Single, as well as married, in the many cross Accidents of Life, in Disappointments in their worldly Affairs, in Poverty, Sicknes, and the Rest ; which, if accepted as coming from the Hands of God and the wise Dispositions of a benign Providence, and bore with a due Resignation to the Divine Will and a Christian Patience, may be more acceptable at the Throne of Mercy than several Mortifications undertaken of their own Head, and be an effectual Sponge to wipe off the Debts of their Youth, mispent in Folly, Sin and Vanity. Again, an inviolable Observance of the Fasts and Regulations of the Church, where infirmity of Body and bad Health does not plead for a Dispensation ; and done in the true Spirit of the Church ; as it reaps the Merit of Obedience, so is certainly so far preferable to
E Mortifications

Mortifications of our own chusing, and Works of Supererogation, that, in Truth, *these* will not be agreeable to Almighty God, while the *others* of *Obligation* are neglected.

THERE is another Source of Merit, not the least considerable, in a Public Life, which even the State of Solitude is debarred of ; the Mortifications, I mean, that ordinarily occur, and are almost inevitable, from a Commerce with the World ; *viz*, The Moroseness and uncooth, disagreeable Behaviour of some ; the Pride, Haughtiness and arbitrary Deportment of others ; the Impertinences of many, and the heterogeneal Humours of all. Here, I say, the Anchorer can be no Ways concerned : For, as he has bid adieu to the World and it's Pleasures, so he is out of the Opportunity of being obnoxious to it's Contradictions and Impertinences, which to those that are conversant with the World, and live in the midst of it, subminister great Matter of Patience, and of much Merit, and cannot fail of becoming a satisfactory Atonement for their Sins.

LASTLY, that inexhaustible Treasure of Grace, the Eucharistical Blessing, which it is in our Power to partake of as often as we please, by rendering ourselves not unworthy of it, is another Advantage we have over Anchorers, whom

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whom nothing but the Orders of God, manifested to them in a Manner, leaving no Doubt of their coming from Him, can justify their debarring themselves this ineffable Help to, and Means of Salvation. I say, therefore, to every Sinner, *Repent*, because you have the Means, while you even continue in the World, in every State and Condition, of doing it. *Do Penance*, or (you have heard our Blessed Saviour tell you, and not only you, that is, not the Sinner alone, but every one else) *you shall all likewise perish*. [Luke c. 13. v. 3. 5.] Our Blessed Lord, I say, addresses himself here indiscriminately to all, to the Innocent as well as to the Guilty; because while the One has Occasion for Penance to satisfy for Sins he has committed, the Other stands in need of it as a Preservative of his Virtue, and an Antidote to Sins he may commit. Our Blessed Lord himself, who was free from all Sin, led a Life of Penance: St. *John Baptist*, who was sanctified in his Mother's Womb, inculcated it by Word and Example: St. *Mary of Egypt*, who had sullied the first Part of her Life by an irregular Conduct, wiped off the Stain by a long and severe Penance: And, therefore, who can plead for an Exemption from it? No: Christ has

led the Way ; he can't for shame refuse to accept of him for his Guide : He is not more innocent than St. *John Baptist* ; and if he has been guilty of Sin, he can no more be excused making a satisfactory Atonement for it than St. *Mary of Egypt*.

BUT tho' there be many who have not copied the ignominious Part of her Life, and can't reproach themselves with her Transgressions of a gross and shameful Nature ; are they yet wholly free from spiritual Vices, more heinous, perhaps, in the Sight of God, and more fatal in their Consequence than *Mary's* Disorders, tho' less glaring and infamous, and by themselves often undiscerned or disregarded. Pride, a Child of *Lucifer*, a Monster begot indeed in Heaven, but drove immediately thence and precipitated into the Abyfs of Hell, its natural and fittest Residence ; yet broke it's Confinement there, and early made it's Way to the Earth : Here it breathed wide its pestilential Contagion, communicating it to Man ; and who can flatter himself that he has not caught the Infection ? It creeps into Cloysters ; it vitiates the best of our Actions, and even shelters itself under the Cover of its opposite Virtue. The haughty, arbitrary Deportment of many, seated on the
Pinnacle

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Pinnacle of Honour, or intrusted with the Staff of Power ; their scornful, supercilious Contempt of Inferiors and Dependents, Self-conceit, Overrating their own Merits, Undervaluing their Neighbour's, spring all from this venomous Source. An unforgiving Temper is another Offspring of Pride ; carrying a Heart impatient of the least Affront, big with Resentment, and breathing Revenge. Secret Grudges and Animosities ; an illnatured Satisfaction at our Adversary's Misfortunes ; a gnawing Envy at their Prosperity and Well-doing, are also spiritual Vices not more common, than entertained without Scruple or Remorse. Ambition of worldly Honours, Esteem and Applause ; an immoderate Desire of Riches, sparing neither Fraud, Usury, nor scarce open Rapine to get at 'em, are become fashionable Passions. And can a Heart, inwardly cankered with this spiritual Rust, have less Need of the corrosive Remedy of Penance to wear it off, than a Soul stained with Vices that reflect outward Shame and Ignominy, have occasion for Penance to wipe off her Disgrace ? Among all the Woes and Menaces Christ thundered out against Sinners, the most dreadful were those He levelled at the Pharisees ; not because their

outward Demeanour was irregular, but for that under a plausible Appearance and a fair Cover they concealed a depraved Heart and a cankered Mind : Like a painted Sepulchre, the Comparison our Blessed Lord made use of, beautiful on the Outside ; within, a Sink of Filth and Corruption. The Woman, caught in Adultery, being brought before him, [*John c. 8.*] He did not proceed to her Condemnation, discharging her with this short salutary Advice ; *Go, and now sin no more :* [*ibid. v. 11.*] But, turning to her Accusers, whose exorbitant Pride, and inward Malice of their Heart He intimately knew, challenged him that was without Fault to throw the first Stone. *Woe to ye Pharisees ! Woe to ye Hypocrites !* was his constant Cry : And then concludes, *Unless ye do Penance you shall all likewise perish.* And so will every one else who copies their Pride, Insincerity and Hypocrisy ; and certainly stands a worse Lay than the most abandoned Libertine becoming a thorough Penitent. Our Blessed Lord himself has shewn the Disparity of their Condition in the Parable of the *Publican* and *Pharisee*. [*Luke c. 18. v. 10, &c.*] The *Publican*, conscious of his many Enormities, scarce dared to step within the

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the Doors of Temple, but humbly kept at a Distance, not presuming to offer any other Prayer to the Almighty, but that He wou'd be propitious to him a Sinner, and have Mercy on him. The *Pharisee*, at the same Time, elated with his presumptuous Conceits of his own Justice, enumerated his pretended Deeds of Virtue ; and, in particular, made a Merit of not being like the infamous Publican there present. But what was the different Success of their Prayer at the Divine Tribunal ? Our Blessed Saviour tells us : The *Publican* was heard, the *Pharisee* rejected ; the Humility of the one turning to his Justification ; the Pride of the other to his Reprobation.

MANY, blessed with a happy Temperament of Mind and a pious Education, are thereby not only secured from the Corruptions of the World, but removed also from the Occasions and even the Temptation ; but yet, their Preservation being visibly providential, they have no Reason to think much of themselves on this Account ; especially, if by leading an indolent Life, tho' otherwise harmless and inoffensive ; by trifling it away immoderately upon Game and indifferent Pastimes, they become criminal, while they deem themselves innocent. For,
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the Servant, who had hid his Talent, [*Matt. c. 25. v. 25, &c.*] was therefore punished by his Master for not improving it. Loss of Time is an Abuse of it, and Amusements, innocent in themselves, may be criminal in their Excess. But tho', in the Whole, the Lives of such may not be liable to the Imputation of being sinful, how far will they still at least fall short of the Perfection even of those, who having strayed at first out of the Paths of Virtue, and returning late into 'em again, yet by taking larger Strides, make a speedier Advance towards it in a shorter Time? The Labourer in the Gospel, who came into the Vineyard at the eleventh Hour, [*Matt. c. 20. v. 9, &c.*] received the same Wages as he who began his Work at the First, and had gone thro' the Burden and Heat of the Day, because his Industry was superior to the other's, and he earn'd as much in less Time.

So it is, Christian Reader, The Sinner, how notorious soever he may have been, is not to be contemned: Because, thro' the Grace of God, he may in an Instant become as great a Saint. The good Thief on the Cross was such. And how infamous soever may have been the first Part of the Sinner's Life, he
may,

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may, with the Divine Helps, retrieve it by a seasonable Repentance, and become such a Pattern of consummate Virtue, as the most Innocent need not disdain to take for their Example and Model : Such was St. MARY of *Egypt*, whose Story you have just read.

BUT yet, after, all, whosoever you be, Penitent or Innocent ; whatsoever Gifts ye are endowed with, you have 'em not from yourselves ; they are the Effects of God's gratuitous Favour. *By the Grace of God*, said the Apostle, *I am what I am* : And, therefore, when ye have done all that is, seemingly, in your Power, and all that you think Almighty God requires of you, on your own Side, remember that you are still unprofitable Servants, and that on God alone is to be your Reliance, on His Goodness, on His Mercy, through *Christ's* infinite Merits and Sufferings. Within his sacred Wounds you are to shelter yourself at last ; *them* you must present to the Divine Justice ; *them* He will not, He cannot refuse to accept of ; and from *them* your own Good Works are to derive their Merit, and be render'd worthy of his Acceptance.

INVOKÉ, next, the Blessed Virgin, and solicit her to come to your Aid ; entreat her, importune.

portune her to interpose her Interest in your Behalf : It was never heard of any One's failing of Success, who, with an unfeigned Desire of Mercy, had Recourse to her Intercession. She is the Refuge of Sinners and Mother of Mercy ! and delights to be employ'd in the charitable Office.

AND then if, animated by our illustrious Penitent's Example, you have enter'd upon a penitential Life, take her also for your Patroness, and doubt not of her becoming a strenuous Advocate for you at the Throne of Mercy.

LASTLY request, also, your Angel Guardian to join with the whole Heavenly Choir, in presenting your Tears, your Sighs, and your Petitions : He was Witness of your many Misdemeanours, Infidelities and enormous Ingratitudes, and was afflicted thereat ; and he will be now as much rejoiced at your sincere Repentance. *There shall be Joy before the Angels of GOD, upon one Sinner doing Penance.* [Luke, c. 15. v. 10.] *Because the Sheep that was lost is found again.* [v. 6.] *Because the Prodigal Son, that was dead, is come to Life again ; was lost and is found.* [v. 24.]





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